



“We select songs that speak of love, the homeland, foreign lands, as well as subjects that speak about children” says the school’s music teacher, Γρηγόρης Ζάπρας

“Dance and music are a way to give voices to people in prison” says Italian Lawyer and ex prisoner Presi Per Caso

“Arts deter aggressiveness in prisons” says Mike Maloney, in charge of artistic programmes for 22 years in the 3 prisons in Northern Ireland.

“Through music and dance people can express their sentiments without being exposed” says Torbjorn Rodal, in charge of the programme in the high-security prison in Oslo,

“Generally we encourage people to improvise in order they feel safe and unthreatened ” says Alan Clarke, Movable Barres project coordinator

The art of music and dance makes the everyday routine for young men in the Prison for Minors and Young Offenders in Avlona less unpleasant and monotonous. The students can take part in courses of traditional Greek dance, music and song and can also create music and words themselves, filling their hours creatively and productively.

by Nafsika Karagiannides

“Dancing behind Barres”

The European project MOVABLE BARRES involves 10 countries of the EU and aims to encourage and promote the training of prisoners through the teaching of music and dance. Representatives from the Movable Barres project recently visited the school in Avlona and watched a wonderful presentation which had been prepared for them by the students and their professors.

The presentation began with music and song, with the Deputy manager of school, Ioannis Papadimitriou playing guitar with a 20-year-old Lithuanian student who is serving a sentence for narcotics. The student said, “I have played guitar for 2 months and I feel that I’ve found something that fills me which I will continue when I am released”. The musical programme closed with 2 African students - one from Algeria, the other from Morocco - who roused the audience by playing drums. “I love the music, it makes me feel happy. I’ve played the drum since the age of 10; it is easy for me and it reminds me of my homeland”, said the 20-year-old Algerian, who is also serving a sentence for narcotics. “For our presentation, we selected songs that speak of love, the homeland, foreign lands and subjects that speak about children”, declares Grigoris Zarras, Professor of Music at the school.

The audience then watched a group of students perform some traditional Greek dances. “I like to dance, because it means I have something to do”, says a 19-year-old Albanian student. “Dancing makes you forget that you are in prison”, adds his 19-year-old schoolmate and his compatriot, both in prison for theft. “Through dance, the students improve their kinetic faculties, the exercise activates cells in the brain

and thus they find it easier to engage in the courses”, said Maria Politi, professor of Physical Education and Dance. After the presentation by the students, the professors taught chasapiko dance to the European delegates, in order they could then teach the dance to prisoners in their own countries. “The dance, the music and more generally the arts are a way to give people a voice in jail”, said the 43-year-old Italian lawyer Presi Per Caso, a former prisoner. He, along with other prisoners created a rock band in prison which they continued when they were released. Today, they perform all over Europe and record CDs. Being able to continue with something like this outside of prison gives prisoners new opportunities when they are released.

Alan Clarke, coordinator of MOVABLE BARRES and Professor of Theatre in Manchester College explains, “because most detainees have low educative level, dance and music are more accessible and have also educational and recreational possibilities. We begin with the music and the dance; the prisoners write verses, making their own contact with literature and language”. He adds, “in the beginning, the prisoners didn't want to dance; they saw dance as something feminine, a mentality that dominates almost everywhere in Europe. This is why we often teach them hip-hop and leave them to improvise in order that they do not feel that it is compromising their masculinity”.

Torbjorn Rodal, in charge of the programme in the high-security prison in Oslo says that, “through the music and the dance the students can express their sentiments without being exposed”.

“The arts deter the aggressiveness in the prison. The prisoners find creating music is something that calms them down, they momentarily forget that they are in prison and do not display aggression towards each other. When come out from the prison, all that they have learned will be useful to them as musicians and in other parts of their life” says Mike Moloney, in charge of artistic programmes for 22 years in the 3 prisons in Northern Ireland.



Partners from Europe along with teachers from Avlona dance a traditional Greek dance in the school yard.